Christmas Books That Will Interest All Kinds of Readers.

Here Are Some Valuable Hints on the Kinds of Fiction Girls Like.

IN a Christmas catalogue and review of new books issued by a prominent publishing house is an article thirty-one pages long upon "Holiday Books for Young People." Five pages treat of publications intended expressly for girls. The reviewer begins this branch of the subject with "Three very good books for girls—the long-neglected girls."

Such neglect is wholesome. There is no more reason for boys and girls reading different classes of books than that the sister should eat bread and milk from five to fifteen years of age, while the brother is built up on beefsteak and vegetables.

An essay upon "Little Pharisees of Fiction," by Agnes Repplier, deals with a certain class of literature, which, "in many a well-trained English nursery makes the art of reading a thoroughly undesirable accomplishment."

The witty saying borrows a keener edge from our inspection of the book shelves which are an indispensable part of the plenishing of our girl's bedchamber or boudoir.

"Do you take much exercise in the open air?" asked a friend of an uptown boarding school girl.

"Oh, yes! We walk around the reservoir every day."

When the demure pedestrian is graduated she will take to the saddle and the wheel, as the bent bow rebounds to the straight line. When she is permitted to choose books for herself, she will reject over-sweetened intellectual pap and plunge zestfully into erotic, neurotic or agnostic literature, as the fancy seizes her.

In this age women's limitations are all physical. It is trite to say that mind is sexless. The platitude is assumed as axiomatic by instructors. Our wisest thinkers plead for woman's right to be regarded as a human creation of the feminine gender, and the peer of man. Having established the justice of our claim, theoretically, we stultify ourselves by diluting our girl's drink, and bolting the flour for her bread.

The best thing that can be said of the conventional "Girls' Library" is that the possessor thereof, if she have a mind and tastes of her own, reads comparatively little of it. A bright girl, eager in intellect and vigorous in health, will confess frankly her preference for "The Deerslayer" above "Elsie Dinsmore," and that she would rather read Kingsley's "Westward Ho," than "The Wide, Wide World." The instincts assert themselves when she is allowed to choose for herself.

Shakespeare, unexpurgated, for mental sustenance, and "Pilgrim's Progress" for Sunday reading, are a proper mental provender for a child who has to live in the world as it is and take her chances among men and women, than "Queechy" and the average Sunday-school book. Miss Repplier's trenchant satire upon "offensively" pious little Christians who belong to an order of things as extinct, I hope and believe, as the dodo, is softened by pity for the product of Sunday-school literature.

It is not to be set down to the credit of the manufacturer of the endless "Series for Girls" that the young eyes of American children are not hopelessly myopic as to the nature and conditions of the present and actual world, which they are to make better or worse in the coming century. The models set up for them are out of drawing, the perspective is false, the coloring is florid in pictures they are assured are taken from life, and the proportions minimized. The result is a German toy village, or a Noah's Ark where the elephant stands no taller than Japhet.

As a matron of years, who in childhood browsed at will in a library of English classics, assimilating much that was good and strong, and getting, I honestly believe, nothing that was harmful, I hold and believe for certain that the human brain, in youth and in maturity, should be obliged to work for what it gets. Mothers who study dietetics have learned that the child must chew even his porridge to induce the digestion in which the salivary glands are an important agent. Therefore, I would give our girl of fifteen "grown-up people's books" to read. Better that she should fail to comprehend some portions of them than that the mind muscles should not be exercised. It is not conservatism in the ordinary acceptation of the term that inclines me to select "Ivanhoe," and not "Trilby," as the novel she is to enjoy in the holidays. I am still so wedded to early traditions as to recommend "Sunday reading" for the day of rest. But I would fill our girl's Sunday shelf alluringly. Old-fashioned favorites should not be slighted. "The Schoenberg Cotta Family" may be kept in countenance by "The Heir of Redclyffe," and "The Daisy Chain" and other of Miss Yonge's stories of real boys and girls. Her conscientious allowance of a dozen to each household still startles us at the twentieth repetition, but they are enchantingly natural children, in whom our common human nature brings into play naughtiness and lovableness, each after its kind—and no two are alike. Crowded, shoulder to shoulder, with these rusty and dog-eared, because well-beloved, books, should be "Auld Licht Idyls" and "Window in Thrums" and A. D. T. Whitney's "Hitherto." For serious reading and spiritual nourishment in the "quiet hour," when even fifteen looks into the depths of a soul that longs for the real and eternal, give her Ian Maclaren's "Mind of the Master," that tender, crystal-clear, uplifting outcome of latter day inspiration.

Other shelves should hold Lang's "Moah of Fife," Kingsley's "Greek Heroes" and "Hypatia;" Shakespeare's, Longfellow's, Whittier's, Aldrich's and Tennyson's poems; "John Halifax" and "A Noble Life," "Pride and Prejudice," and Mrs. Oliphant's best novels, with as many volumes of Dickens as the owner can make room for. Whether she has room or not, "Vanity Fair," "Pendennis" and "Henry Esmond" must stand in high places. "Middlemarch" and "The Mill on the Floss" are for later years. Biography must have at least two shelves. "The Life of Lawrence Oliphant," Morley's "English Men of Letters," "Four Famous Frenchwomen," the brilliant monographs of St. Amand and the series of "Famous Women," which includes the lives of Roland, De Stael, Emily Bronte and others. For "semi-solid reading" you cannot do better than to add Agnes Repplier's two volumes of essays, John Burrough's "Locusts" and "Wild Honey," one book of Emerson's, and the "Essays of Elia."

Give our girls pure, wholesome food, convenient for the growing immortal. Life is not a holiday. Fit her for life's work.

MARIAN HARLAND.

THE CHARM OF GREAT AUTHORS.

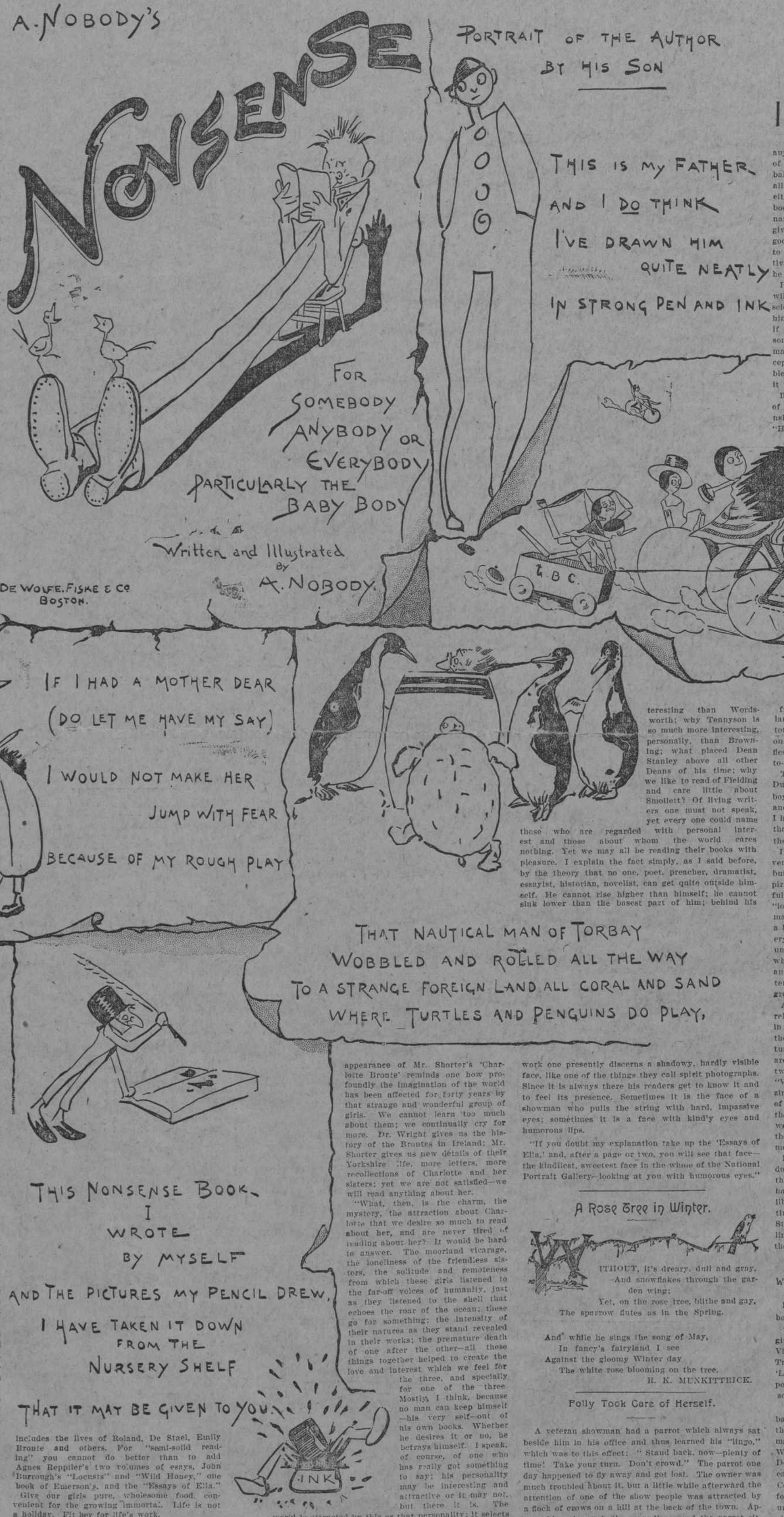
"We were talking the other day," says Walter Besant, "about the personal love with which the world regards some of the authors who gain a hearing. The appearance of Mr. Shorter's 'Charlotte Bronte' reminds one how profoundly the imagination of the world has been affected for forty years by that strange and wonderful group of girls. We cannot learn too much about them; we continually cry for more. Dr. Wright gives us the history of the Brontes in Ireland; Mr. Shorter gives us new details of their Yorkshire life, more letters, more recollections of Charlotte and her sisters; yet we are not satisfied—we will read anything about her.

"What, then, is the charm, the mystery, the attraction about Charlotte that we desire so much to read about her, and are never tired of reading about her? It would be hard to answer. The moorland vicarage, the loneliness of the friendless sisters, the solitude and remoteness from which these girls listened to the far-off voices of humanity, just as they listened to the shell that echoes the roar of the ocean; these go for something; the intensity of their natures as they stand revealed in their works; the premature death of one after the other—all these things together helped to create the love and interest which we feel for the three, and specially for one of the three. Mostly, I think, because no man can keep himself—his very self—out of his own books. Whether he desires it or no, he betrays himself. I speak, of course, of one who has really got something to say; his personality may be interesting and attractive or it may not, but there it is. The world is attracted by this or that personality; it selects one writer out of two on account of the revealed soul; it gives him all its sympathy, interest, curiosity and affection; and leaves the other alone even while it reads his works with pleasure.

"Explain, if you can, why Byron is so much more interesting than Wordsworth; why Tennyson is so much more interesting, personally, than Browning; what placed Dean Stanley above all other Deans of his time; why we like to read of Fielding and care little about Smollett? Of living writers one must not speak, yet every one could name those who are regarded with personal interest and those about whom the world cares nothing. Yet we may all be reading their books with pleasure. I explain the fact simply, as I said before, by the theory that no one, poet, preacher, dramatist, essayist, historian, novelist, can get quite outside himself. He cannot rise higher than himself; he cannot sink lower than the basest part of him; behind his work one presently discerns a shadowy, hardly visible face, like one of the things they call spirit photographs. Since it is always there his readers get to know it and to feel its presence. Sometimes it is the face of a showman who pulls the string with hard, impassive eyes; sometimes it is a face with kind'y eyes and humorous lips.

"If you doubt my explanation take up the 'Essays of Elia,' and, after a page or two, you will see that face—the kindliest, sweetest face in the whole of the National Portrait Gallery—looking at you with humorous eyes."

Whims and Whizzles for Children of All Sizes.



Books That Boys Like to Find on Their Christmas Trees.

IN selecting a book for a bright, healthy American boy remember that in his eyes life has two grand divisions—work and play. To the former belong all things of an instructive nature, such as history, botany, chemistry, zoology and sermons and moral essays of any description whatever. The latter embraces baseball, football, skating, hunting, schoolboy mischief of all sorts—in short, everything that could be called either fun or adventure. If you wish to give a boy a book that he will read, see that it relates to the last named or brighter side of his life. If you wish to give him something calculated to do him a world of good and to turn his attention from sports and frivolity to more serious matters, select a moral and instructive volume relating to the other phase of his life, and he will never read a page of it.

In short, if you desire to give him something that will impart a glow of satisfaction to your own conscience at an unusually cheap price for that luxury, give him something with a moral or instructive name, but if you wish to do the boy himself some good, select some story of fun or adventure that has a healthy, manly and natural tone, and contains also good precepts, or perhaps a little useful knowledge so artfully blended with the tale that the young reader will absorb it unawares.

Remember, above all things, that the American boy of to-day is by no means the simple lad who flourished during the period of "Sandford and Merton," or "Harry and Lucy." He reads newspapers, discusses the events of the day with his comrades and perhaps learns something from his school teacher about contemporaneous history. If we follow him to his home we find that the old rule that children should be seen and not heard has been relegated to obscurity, and that this fifteen-year-old lad has a recognized place in the family councils and that the conversation at the dinner table is no longer monopolized by his elders. I cannot better illustrate my meaning than by relating the brief history of a juvenile paper that was started a few years ago by some friends of mine. The first number, which was widely circulated among possible subscribers, contained a front page picture of a boy riding on a Shetland pony, and within two months the publication had tottered to its fall. Sanford and Merton probably rode on ponies, but the smallest thing in the way of horseflesh that will content a high-spirited American boy of to-day is a mustang, an unbroken one preferred.

The books of adventure written by Mayne Reid, Paul Du Chaillu and G. A. Henty are extremely popular with boys, because in their pages the elements of adventure and success are dealt out with unsparing hand. In fact, I have found more excitement in one of these volumes than a man like Kit Carson would experience during the whole of his life on the plains.

I am not prepared to state exactly what form of adventure finds the highest degree of favor with boys, but I must confess to a strong predilection for an antipiratical career, because it combines so many delightful features. For example, there is the pursuit of the "long, low, rakish looking craft" by the swift schooner, manned partly by boys; the capture of the vessel, after a bloody hand-to-hand combat on the deck; the discovery of the maiden in the cabin, and then the long hunt under the maiden's guidance for the treasure isle in which the freebooters have lived and accumulated antique silverware. A book of this sort is sure to interest boys and I am not sure that it does them any great harm.

After stories of adventure on sea and prairie, those relating to boarding school life find the highest favor in juvenile eyes. Of course, "Tom Brown at Rugby" is the greatest book of this sort known to English literature—it has outlived those by Canon Farrar, but there are a few others that are well worth reading. About twenty-five years ago a writer who signed himself "Vieux Moustache" published in the Riverside Magazine, the leading juvenile periodical of that day, a series of boarding school stories, called, if I remember rightly, the "Once Upon a Time Club," and if those stories were reprinted in book form I can heartily recommend the volume as a gift that would be sure to please almost any boy of fifteen.

In conclusion, let us remember that young America does not confine himself altogether to the literature that is especially designed for him, but has a strong hankering after some of the books in his father's library. It will not come amiss, then, at Christmas time to look out for choice or new editions of Cooper, Stevenson, Dickens, Clark Russell, Conan Doyle, Kipling and other writers whose virility will commend them to boyish readers.

JAMES L. FORD.

A Rose Tree in Winter.

WITHOUT, it's dreary, dull and gray,
And snowflakes through the garden wing;
Yet, on the rose tree, blithe and gay,
The sparrow flutes as in the Spring.

And while he sings the song of May,
In fancy's fairyland I see
Against the gloomy Winter day
The white rose blooming on the tree.

R. K. MUNKITTRICK.

Polly Took Care of Herself.

A veteran showman had a parrot which always sat beside him in his office and thus learned his "lingo," which was to this effect: "Stand back, now—plenty of time! Take your turn. Don't crowd." The parrot one day happened to fly away and got lost. The owner was much troubled about it, but a little while afterward the attention of one of the show people was attracted by a flock of crows on a hill at the back of the town. Approaching the spot, the man discovered the parrot sitting on a log with his feathers up, trying to defend himself against a score of crows. And not only was he thus found, but there he sat, screaming at the top of his voice: "Stand back, now—plenty of time! Take your turn. Don't crowd."

BOOKS AS CHRISTMAS GIFTS.

Walter Besant's Idea of the Best Holiday Presents.

For holiday gifts, says Walter Beasant, I recommend books. No one can have too many books.

"Now there are certain books which every boy and girl ought to possess. 'The Pilgrim's Progress,' 'The Vicar of Wakefield,' Shakespeare, Milton, 'The Golden Treasury,' selections from Robert Browning, Southey's 'Life of Nelson,' some of Tennyson's books, such as the poems of the 1800 (?) edition, 'Maud' and a few others; some of Dickens's, some of Thackeray's.

"When we come to living writers the choice is embarrassing; you may take some of the earlier works or those of this year. For instance, there is Barrie; you may take 'Sentimental Tommy' or you may take 'A Window in Thrums' or any other. There is Conan Doyle. You may take 'Rodney Stone' or one of his earlier books. Here is Austin Dobson's 'Eighteenth Century Vignettes.' It is the third series; up, therefore, and command the other two. Here are two volumes of Rudyard Kipling; his voice in the book of verse rings like a clarion over the Seven Seas; it is given to him to awaken our hearts to a sense of empire. Here is Mr. Clement Shorter's 'Charlotte Bronte;' here is Mark Twain with sobered looks leading the Maid Miraculous. Here is Rider Haggard disguised as a wizard.